



# THE METRICAL PSALTER OF KING JAMES VI

## AND ITS CONNECTION WITH THE ONE PRESENTLY IN USE

BY THE REV. WM. M'MILLAN, PH.D., D.D.

IN the General Assembly held at Burntisland in 1601, among other matters discussed were those of new versions of the Scriptures and of the Metrical Psalter. With regard to the first, nothing was done at that time, but a few years later, when James had become King of England, the project was carried through; though, so far as is known, no Scots minister took any part in the work of translation.

Speaking of the Metrical Psalter then in use, some of the members of the Assembly alleged errors in different psalms, and it was agreed that Robert Pont should take up the work of revision. He was to report his diligence to the next General Assembly; but, if he did so, no record of his report is now extant. Calderwood, who gives an account of the 1601 Assembly,<sup>1</sup> says nothing about the King taking any part in the discussion; but Archbishop Spotswood<sup>2</sup> tells us that James had a good deal to say on the matter: "when he (the King) came to speak of the Psalms," says the Archbishop, "he did recite whole verses of the same, showing both the faults of the metre and the discrepance from the text."

Some ten years before this (1591) James had published a little work, entitled "Poetical Exercises at Vacant Hours," in which he informed the readers that, should his verses be accepted, he intended to publish a number of psalms that he had "perfited"; and would be encouraged to proceed "to the ending out of the rest." Whether he had prepared any more, before his departure for England, is doubtful; but there is still preserved in the British Museum a MS. in the King's handwriting, containing thirty psalms in metre. In these the Scottish dialect is plainly marked.<sup>3</sup>

Spotswood tells us that after His Majesty went to London he made

<sup>1</sup> Calderwood, *History IV*, 124.

<sup>2</sup> Spotswood, *History III*, 98.

<sup>3</sup> Owing to war conditions, this book cannot be examined at present.

the revision of the psalms "his own labour, and at such hours, as he might spare from the public cares, went through a number of them; commending the rest to a faithful and learned servant, who hath therein answered His Majesty's expectation." King James died in 1625 and his funeral sermon was preached by the Bishop of Lincoln, who stated that at the time of his death, "when God called him to sing psalms with the angels," His Majesty was engaged "with the translation of our Church Psalms. . . . This work was stayed in the one and thirty Psalm."<sup>1</sup> At first sight it might appear that James had versified the first thirty Psalms and had not finished the thirty-first at the time when he died. It may be that the reference is to the thirty, which are to be found in the MS. book in the British Museum. These are Psalms 1 to 21 (except the 8th), Psalms 29, 47, 100, 102, 125, 128, 131, 133, 148, and 150. There are also in the MS. metrical paraphrases of the 12th chapter of Ecclesiastes, of the Lord's Prayer and of the Song of Moses. It may be noticed that the 23rd Psalm is not among those verified by the King. Ferguson, in his *Memoir of Sir William Alexander of Menstrie*, "the faithful and learned servant" referred to by Spotswood, relates an anecdote regarding the work of versification. The King is reported to have said, "Menstrie, we left off at Psalm twenty twa; the next's a teuch ane, but fine and short: let's hae a try at it."<sup>2</sup> If this Psalm was put into metrical form by James it was not preserved in the British Museum MS.

We have an interesting sidelight on the monarch's work in a letter dated 18th April, 1620, sent by Alexander to his friend, William Drummond of Hawthornden. The latter had also been versifying some psalms and had sent a specimen of his work to Alexander, who, in due course, replied as follows: "Brother, I received your last letter, with the Psalm you sent, which I think very well done. I had done the same long before it came; but he (James) prefers his own to all else; though, perchance when you see it, you will think it the worst of the three. No man must meddle with that subject, and therefore I advise you to take no more pains therein; but I, as I have ever wished you, would have you to make choice of some new subject."<sup>3</sup>

Sir William Alexander, who assisted the King in this work, belonged to an ancient Scottish family, which traced its descent from Somerled, who was Lord of the Isles, in the reign of Malcolm the Maiden.<sup>4</sup> Somerled's descendant, John, married Margaret, daughter of King Robert II, and

<sup>1</sup> The Bishop's sermon was published with the title "Great Britain's Solomon." An extract will be found in Macmeeken, *The Scottish Metrical Psalms*, 16.

<sup>2</sup> R. M. Ferguson, *Alexander Hume*, 135.

<sup>3</sup> *Drummond's Works* (1711), 151.

<sup>4</sup> This claim is not supported by record evidence.

the eighth in descent from this couple was the versifier of the Psalms. He was born about the year 1567, in the old House of Menstrie<sup>1</sup> in the Parish of Logie,<sup>2</sup> and received his early education at the Grammar School of Stirling. He afterwards studied at Leyden, and while still a young man was introduced to the Court of King James by the Earl of Argyll, to whom he had been tutor.

His scholarship and poetic gifts made him a favourite with the British Solomon, who liked to be considered as a patron of literature and learning. In 1603 Alexander accompanied the sovereign to England, and in due course James made him tutor of Henry, Prince of Scotland and Wales. He also became Master of the Household, Knight and Master of Requests. By Charles he was appointed Secretary of State for Scotland in 1626,<sup>3</sup> and was raised to the peerage, three years later, as Lord Alexander of Tullibody. In 1633 he became Earl of Stirling and Viscount Canada, the latter title having reference to his work as coloniser of Nova Scotia. In 1639 he was made Earl of Davon and died the following year.

His first work of any consequence was "Darius: a Tragedy," which was published in Edinburgh in 1603, and in the years following he wrote a number of other pieces which, though mostly forgotten now, were well received in their own day. Drummond of Hawthornden refers to Alexander as "that most excellent spirit and earliest gem of our North."<sup>4</sup> An English contemporary writer<sup>5</sup> declares that "Alexander the Great gained not more glory with his sword than this Alexander did with his pen." Later writers, such as Addison and Swift, speak of him as a poet in terms of high praise.<sup>6</sup> Professor Masson calls him "the author of a large quantity of fluent and stately English verse."<sup>7</sup>

It was then to Alexander that King Charles handed over the task of completing his royal father's work. In a letter to the Archbishop of St. Andrews, dated 25th August, 1626, the King states that the "Psalms

<sup>1</sup> From the name of his estate his Psalms were sometimes referred to as "Menstrie's Psalms."

<sup>2</sup> R. M. Ferguson, *Alexander Hume*, 110. His birth is sometimes stated to be 1580, the year of his father's death.

<sup>3</sup> His salary was only one hundred pounds stg. per annum, but the privileges granted him by the King added considerably to his income. Among other privileges, he was allowed to issue small coins called "turners" from the town of Tournois in France, where it was believed such money had been first coined. The motto of the Earl was "Per mare, per terras," which Scot of Scotstarvet afterwards parodied, "Per metre, per turners."

<sup>4</sup> In a letter of the year 1614.

<sup>5</sup> John Davies of Hereford, in a book of epigrams.

<sup>6</sup> *Scottish Nation* I, 112.

<sup>7</sup> Masson, *Drummond of Hawthornden*, 328. The "*Poetical Works of Sir William Alexander with Memoirs and Notes*" were published in three volumes, at Glasgow, in 1870.



in metre presently used are very imperfect," and "that, for the good of all the churches within his dominions," his father had been pleased to begin a new translation. This translation had been handed over to Alexander "to review the metre and the poesie thereof," and the King wanted the Archbishop, with some of the most learned ministers in Scotland, to examine the results; so that he (Charles) might know whether it was fitting "that they be published and sung in churches instead of the old translation or not."<sup>1</sup>

This meeting of Scottish Divines was duly held. The Psalter, as revised by Sir William Alexander, was laid before them, and it was decided that the work had been well done and that it was "fit to be sung in churches." In December, 1627, Charles granted a licence to Alexander, which gave him the exclusive right to print this royal Psalter for the space of thirty-one years in consideration of "the great pains already taken by him in collecting and reviewing" the work of the late king.<sup>2</sup> In a little less than four years<sup>3</sup> the book, bearing the title, "The Psalms of King David translated by King James," was published at Oxford by William Turner, printer to the University. To what extent was that title justified? Were the Psalms in metre the work of King James at all; or were they the production of his "faithful and learned servant," William Alexander? The evidence undoubtedly points strongly in the direction of Alexander's authorship. So far as the manuscripts left by King James are concerned, it is difficult, if not impossible, to connect them with the completed Psalter.<sup>4</sup> It has already been said that, in the British Museum, there is a book among the royal MSS. containing written copies of thirty psalms. The great majority of these appear to have been preliminary drafts. It seems to have been the king's custom to use separate sheets for his verses, and when these were shaped to his mind he cancelled them by drawing his pen through them, transferring them to a more permanent record, in what he terms the "blew buik." Of the thirty psalms, only four are marked as being so transferred, Nos. 5, 12, 128 and 133, these being stated to be "insert in the blew buik."

<sup>1</sup> Baillie's *Letters and Journals*: Appendix III, 530.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note that, two years after granting this licence to Alexander, Charles repeated an order, made by his father in his sixth parliament, ordaining all householders to have copies of the Bible and the Psalm Book; the latter, of course, being the volume containing the Reformation Psalter. *Privy Council Register*, 2nd Series, III, 266.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Rorison (a typed copy of whose work is in the General Assembly Library) thinks that a fuller manuscript volume of the King's writings must have been in existence. That is possible, even probable, but there is little direct evidence to support the conjecture.

But, when we examine the 1631 version, we find that the metrical Psalms printed therein bear little or no resemblance to those which the king had considered to be completed and which he had transferred to the other record. Thus the 133rd Psalm, as the king left it, read as follows :

Ps. CXXXIII

“ How goode and pleasant thing lo doth appeare,  
 Accorde amongst thaimselfis of brethren deare,  
 Quho dwell together in a godlie love ;  
 It is most like that precious unguent deare,  
 poured on the heade, syne triking like a teare,  
 upon the beard down flowing from above.  
 At last doun Aaron’s clothis doth softlie move,  
 quhill to his garments borders low it veare,  
 and round about thaime runne for his behove  
 like crystall dew, distilled on Hermon tall,  
 or balmy drops that does on Sion fall :  
 for on those men God sends his blessing sure,  
 the which is life forever to endure.

Finis.

It is insert in the blew buik.”

In the 1631 Book the same psalm appears thus :

Behold how good a thing it is, and pleasant to the minde,  
 That brethren should together dwell, with bonds of love combined,  
 It like a precious ointment is, distill’d upon the head,  
 Which running down to bath the beard, a dainty smell hath made,  
 Even that of Aaron’s comely beard, which streamed down from  
 his crowne  
 And of his garments to the skirts, in pretious drops fell downe.  
 Like Hermons dew, like dew which did on Sion’s hill descend<sup>1</sup>  
 For there the Lord his blessing plac’d, even life without an end.”

The only changes made in the 1636 book were in the last double line of the first stanza which there reads :

“ Which even to runne as rained down, upon the beard was made.”

Again, the 21st Psalm in the MS. book begins as follows :

<sup>1</sup> The last two lines show the source of the four corresponding lines in the present Psalter.

“ The king O lord rejoices in thy strength  
 and of thy glorious health is wondrous glaid ;  
 his hairtis desyre thou given him hes at length,  
 and also fruitful hes his prayeris made.  
 Yea thou with prosperous blessings him prevenis,  
 and crownes his heade with golde, that purest schenis ; ”

while in the 1631 version these verses run thus :

“ 1. The King, O Lord, he in thy strength shall great contentment take;  
 and him how greatly to rejoice doth thy salvation make.  
 That which his heart affected most, to give thou didst agree  
 and what his lips requested had ; was not kept back by thee.  
 Of goodness, for the blessings thou mad'st him ('ere sought) to get.  
 and thou upon his head, of gold a crown most pure didst set.”

Even a slight examination shows that there is little or nothing to connect the two versions, which differ in style, rhythm, metre and form of words. So far as can be judged from the literary remains of the King, practically nothing of his work has passed into the Psalter which bears his name. It may be taken for granted that the “ blew buik ” was handed over to Sir William Alexander ; but, unless its contents were markedly dissimilar to those found in the MS. in the British Museum, he does not appear to have made much use of it. On the other hand, we must remember that Charles insisted on his father's name being given as the translator and versifier of the Psalms.<sup>1</sup> He speaks of Alexander as one who had simply “ reviewed ” the material King James left, and not as the author of an entirely new production. There can be little doubt that he believed that a considerable part of his father's work was to be found in the new version, and in quite a number of letters he refers to James as the author. Further, contemporary writers seem to have thought that the Psalter was at least to some extent from the pen of the late king. Samuel Rutherford,<sup>2</sup> for example, speaks of “ King James Psalms ” as likely to be imposed on the church, but is silent as to these being the work of any other person. Calderwood speaks of the “ Metaphrasts ” of the new Psalter, showing that he believed that more than one person had had a share of writing it. John Row, while stating that the Psalter was regarded as having more of Alexander's work in it than the king's, yet gives it as his view that both master and servant “ had a hand in it.” One thing is certain and that is that the Scots words used by James have been carefully

<sup>1</sup> Charles may not have been a good king ; but it is difficult to believe that he was deliberately lying in ascribing the new Psalter to his father.

<sup>2</sup> *Letter XV*, Bonar's Edition.



excluded from the printed page. Among others, we find that the King used such forms as "nicht," "richt," "delicht," "upricht," "glaid" (glad), "caffé" (chaff), "lowe" (flame), "syne" (then), and perhaps most characteristic of all, "indwellaris." Our present Psalter might have had more of a Scottish savour if the British Solomon's part in it had been greater.

As the new Psalter was to replace those used both in Scotland and in England we might have expected that those older books would have been laid under contribution to a very considerable extent. But neither of the two Psalters mentioned supplied any great proportion of the nine thousand five hundred lines in that of King James. Calderwood indeed complains that the new "metaphrasts have had such a spite at the old metaphorase that they have left nothing of it for man's memories, even where there was no necessity of a change." Examination shows that in his first statement Calderwood was almost right, for only seventy lines have been transferred to the new from the old. Of these seventy, it may be said, nineteen have been passed on to our present version. We have to remember that much of the older psalters was in peculiar metres, and that these "peculiar" could not have been much used by the ordinary congregations of that era. The new book, having practically every Psalm in common metre, was much more likely to become a favourite with the common people.

But, in addition to the seventy lines, which have been taken as they stand from the Reformation Psalter, there are some ninety others where the difference is only in one word. Thus in the 10th verse of the 86th Psalm the older "for Thou art God alone" has become "Yea Thou art God alone"; or in the better known 139th Psalm, the line in King James (and ours), "O Lord thou hast me searched and known," appears in the the old Psalter with the word "tryed" instead of "searched." Then there are fifteen lines in the new Psalter where the words of the older one re-appear in a different order. Thus, in the 90th Psalm the line, "Before the mountains were brought forth," appears in the Reformation Psalter with the two last words, "forth brought." There are in addition, between, fifty and sixty lines where marked similarity between the old and new may be seen. Thus Ps. 17, "or lurking like a lion's whelp" (old), "and as a lion's lurking whelp" (new), or the better known line in the 31st Psalm, "Into Thine hands Lord I commit" (old), "Into Thy hand I do commit" (new). A number of these lines, altered by King James, appear in our present version; as do other thirteen lines taken by him from the English Reformation Psalter. Three lines in the 1631 book, taken from the older Scots book, but omitted in the 1636 edition, have



found their way into ours. The best known of these is the opening line of the 33rd Psalm, "Ye righteous in the Lord rejoice."

But the old Reformation Psalter of 1562 was not the only one in use in England; if not in Scotland. There was at least one other, Henry Dod's Psalter, which bears the date 1620. In the year that James came to the throne of England, Dod, who belonged to a Cheshire family, had published a small book containing nine metrical psalms which he had written for use by his own family. The King sanctioned its publication, and it proved very popular among the Puritans, the whole issue being speedily bought up. Later, its author was approached by some Puritan ministers with a view to his versifying the whole hundred and fifty psalms. He did so, and the book was published in the year mentioned. Dod's name does not appear in the book, but his initials, "H.D.", are given at the end of the "Address to the Christian Reader," prefixed to the work. George Wither—who gave us our second version of the 148th Psalm<sup>1</sup>—states that copies of Dod's Psalter were burned by the common hangman. There is no proof of this, though in the then state of the country it cannot be considered impossible. There is reason to believe that the book was printed abroad which may indicate that there was some risk attached to its being printed in England.

Dod's version was known to the revisers who gave us our present Psalter, and they took from it over two hundred and sixty lines. In addition a number more, which had been slightly altered by succeeding versifiers, have found a place in the lines we still sing. Forty-four lines from Dods appear in James (1636) and also in our version; while there are one or two more which came to the present book through the 1631 edition of the royal Psalter.

Some of the lines which appear in our Metrical Psalter to-day may be considered to have a "lang pedigree." Three of these may be mentioned. Thus, "His wife a widow make" (Ps. 109, 9) occurs in the old Psalters of 1562 and 1564, in those of Dod, James (1636), the three editions of Francis Rous, 1638-41-43, and in the three editions of Zachary Boyd, 1644-46-48. Perhaps more interesting is, "That all men liars be" (Ps. 116, 11), which occurs in all the Psalters mentioned above, and also in James (1631), and in the Westminster revision of Rous. "Not unto us, Lord, not to us" (Ps. 115, 1) does not occur in the Scots Reformation Psalter; but it occurs in all those already mentioned and also in that of Mure of Rowallan.

Sometime in 1630 Charles sent a copy of the New Psalter (evidently in MS) to the Archbishop of St. Andrews, stating that this had been laid

<sup>1</sup> The version in the Reformation Psalter was written by John Pullain. Wither's work (in the same metre) is much superior to that of Pullain and of James.

before a number of learned divines, who found it "exactlie and trewlie" done. Before proceeding further in the matter, the King wished further examination made by the Archbishop himself; "or by such as shall have direction from you, to that effect." If they found the work worthy to be sung in the churches then they were further to consider how it might be introduced "most convenientlie."<sup>1</sup>

It may be conjectured that Alexander must have been at work on his version during the four years which had elapsed since the King had written the Archbishop concerning it. One can hardly imagine that the version submitted in 1630 was the same as that which had been "perused" by the clergy in Scotland in 1626.

The Archbishop's reply must have been favourable, for, as has been said, the book was published at Oxford in 1631 with the title, "The Psalms of King David translated by King James." It will be noticed that the names of the two kings are linked together and that there is no reference to Alexander at all. To emphasise the united royal effort there is a device on the title page representing King David with his harp on the one side and King James on the other with his sceptre. Both are holding a book. The son of the British Solomon was determined that, so far as type could express the notion, the translator was to be regarded as being as important as the sweet singer of Israel himself. It was a pair of kings who were giving the world this treasure. Under the Royal Arms, at the front of the book, is printed the following: "Charles R. Having caused this translation of the Psalms (whereof our dear Father was Author) to be perused and it being found to be exactly and truly done, we do hereby authorise the same to be imprinted, according to the patent granted thereupon, and do allow them to be sung in all the churches of our dominions, recommending them to all our good subjects for that effect."

Copies of this work were sent to a number of Presbyteries for consideration and report. Possibly copies were on sale in Edinburgh and some other parts of the country. It is often said that the issue of this book excited much indignation in Scotland; but with the exception of the outburst (believed to be Calderwood's), dealt with *infra*, I have failed to find much evidence of this indignation. Indeed, Calderwood himself being witness, the book was not only well known in certain circles, but was even being used, when he wrote; for he states that some had "already used this (the royal) metaphrase when the congregation were singing the old." So frightened was the historian that this movement

<sup>1</sup> *Register of Royal Letters*, II, 462.

might spread that he pled that the use of the new psalter, even in private, "ought to be suppressed."

Row, who was bitterly opposed to Prelacy and all its works, mentions the matter in his history;<sup>1</sup> but does not indicate that the book roused any great resentment. "In the year 1631 . . . there was also a report that the King would have the Psalms of King David, translated and paraphrased by King James, his father, to be received and sung in all the kirks of Scotland; and some of the books were delivered to Presbyteries that ministers might advise concerning the goodness or badness of the translation and report their judgments (not to the General Assembly, for oh! that great bulwark of our Kirk was demolished) to the Diocesan Assemblies;<sup>2</sup> yet that matter was laid aside for a while. The work was commonly thought to be more Sir William Alexander's of Menstrie than the King's, howbeit it is most probable that both has (*sic*) had a hand in it. In the first impression there was (*sic*) some expressions so poetical and so far from the language of Canaan that all who had any religion did dislike them, as calling the sun *the Lord of light*, and the moon *the pale Lady of the night*."<sup>3</sup>

It will be observed that Row's objections were not so much to the book itself, as to the fact that it was being considered without consent of the General Assembly (which had not met since 1618). There is also the suggestion that it was only those who had not "religion" who wanted a change, a charge made a hundred and fifty years later by the "godly" in Scotland against those who wished to introduce the paraphrases.<sup>4</sup> Incidentally one of the phrases fixed upon as showing the "heathenism" of the Paraphrase was one not unlike that mentioned by Row, viz., "The gates of light" (Para. VIII).

Stevenson, who wrote about a hundred and twenty years later,<sup>5</sup> and whose account has been followed by quite a number of other Scottish Church historians, associates the attempted bringing of the new psalter

<sup>1</sup> *Historie*, 352.

<sup>2</sup> The Synods.

<sup>3</sup> The reference is to Psalm 148, the 3rd and 4th verses of which form this stanza:—

" His praise at length delate  
You flaming Lord of light  
And with the starres in state  
Pale Lady of the night  
Heavens heavens Him praise  
And all you floods  
Enclos'd in cloudes  
His glory raise."

<sup>4</sup> Even later, the charge was heard in connection with the introduction of "human hymns."

<sup>5</sup> Stevenson wrote his history between 1755 and 1758. He mentions that Row's History in M.S. was in his hands when he did so.



with a determined effort to change the ways of the Church of Scotland. According to this writer, the Scottish Archbishops were ordered by His Majesty "to assemble the other bishops and such of the ministry as were acceptable to them to advise concerning the bringing in of organs to Cathedral churches, with surplices on those who served there, and a new translation of the psalms, commonly said to have been the work of the late king and the present lord secretary. The organs were accordingly set up in the chapel royal . . . yet the other device did not succeed so well. Copies of that translation were indeed sent to as many of the presbyteries as had members at that meeting, and they were appointed to report their opinions to the next diocesan Assembly; but it contained so many poetical fancies, such as calling the sun the lord of light, and the moon the pale lady of the night, etc., that the bishops were ashamed to push the receiving and using thereof; and so it was laid aside."

A comparison of Stevenson's account with that of Row will show that the former's way of writing history here, as in other instances, was simply to take an earlier writer's account and then add to it some embroidery of his own. Unfortunately, quite a number of later church historians have made Stevenson their authority and have not distinguished between what was genuine and what was additional.<sup>1</sup>

The papers in which the new "metaphrase" of the Psalms are denounced are preserved among the Calderwood MSS. in the National Library and are almost certainly from his pen. The larger of these papers is divided into five sections, of which the first gives the history of the adoption of the older Psalter in 1564 and of its use thereafter. It is claimed that both pastors and people know the psalms and tunes so well that to lose "that heavenly treasure" would be nothing short of a spiritual calamity.<sup>2</sup>

The second section deals with "Reasons against the Public use of the new metaphrase of the Psalms," and is divided into a number of paragraphs, each of which gives a reason against the substitution of the new for the old. (a) The version had been made without the sanction of the Kirk. (b) The people were better acquainted with the old translation than with any book in Scripture. Some people could sing all, or at least the greater part, without book, and some "that cannot read can sing

<sup>1</sup> One of the most interesting of Stevenson's additions to contemporary narratives is that which credits Alexander Henderson with saying at the close of the Glasgow General Assembly of 1638: "We have this day cast down the walls of Jericho. Let him that rebuilds them beware of the curse of Hiel the Bethelite." There is no evidence that any such words were used.

<sup>2</sup> The hollowness of this statement is shown by the laying aside of the old Psalter some years later.



some psalms.”<sup>1</sup> (c) “It is a discredit to the clergy and the Kirk that the psalms should be sung in the Kirk translated in metre by a courtier or common poet.” (d) The work of versifying the psalms is “holy and strict and abides not any youthful or heathenish liberty.” Calderwood had no difficulty in finding “heathenish liberty and poetical conceits” in the new metaphrase. He gives several examples of which we may quote two :

“And with the hue that blushes dye  
shame covered hath my face.” (Ps. 69-7.)

and

“The mercies of the Lord I still  
will sing with sacred rage.” (Ps. 89-1.)

The writer paid some heed to this criticism ; for in the revised edition all the offending lines with one exception were removed. (e) A list of some forty words is given, which it is alleged would not be understood by the ordinary worshipper. Some of these, such as guerdoned, regal, oblogue, verdure, portentous, prodigies, sinister, were deserving of rejection ; but the standard of education in Scotland must have been low if others in the list were unknown to the ordinary men and women of the time.<sup>2</sup> Such were gratefully, opposites, vastness, various, torrents, reside, rays, liquid, vases, shelves. One finds it somewhat difficult to believe Calderwood’s statement that if such words were to be understood it would be necessary to have “a dictionary in the end of the metaphrase.” Here again, however, the criticism did good, for many of the offending words were removed later.

(f) The Church would be infected with the “error of the local descent of Christ’s soul to hell” if the metrical version of Psalm 16 should be allowed. It would have taken a very learned and sharp-eyed theologian to have detected heresy in the lines objected to :<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The number of those who could not read must have been very large, judging from what we find in the public records of the time. In 1627 a report from all the parishes was asked for by the Privy Council. A number of these reports have been preserved, and these were printed many years ago by the Maitland Club. Many parishes had no schools at all, and from one it is reported, “not one of the parish can read or write except the minister.” See Cunningham : *Church History*, I, 510.

<sup>2</sup> The generation, which according to Calderwood was so ignorant, was that which other writers say was quite able to understand the national and other covenants.

<sup>3</sup> In the Scots Reformation Psalter, of which Calderwood thought so highly, an equally “heretical” verse could have been found :

“He thold the last assault of death  
which did life’s torments end  
Thereafter was hee buried  
and did to hell descend.”

“ For Thou wilt never leave my soule  
that it in hell should be :  
Nor suffer wilt Thy holy one  
corruption once to see.”<sup>1</sup>

(g) Other Churches would call the Scots “ light headed, inconstant and unsettled,” if the version of the Psalter in use was exchanged for another. When the exchange was made twenty years later nobody, either at home or abroad, seems to have been unduly disturbed, and certainly no notice of the change was taken officially by any other church.

The third section of the Objections is headed, “ Reasons against the Private use.” According to the objectors, private use of the new Psalter ought to be suppressed, for some people would learn the new rather than the old. They were certain that no one would “ studie to both.” Thus, a metaphrase different from that in use in the Church is the “ most unprofitable work that may be.” Greek or Latin versions might indeed be written ; but not Scots or English ones. There was reason to believe that, if this new Psalter was allowed at all, “ in short process of time it may pass from private use to public.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed some had already used the new verses “ when the congregation were singing the old.” “ A door should not be opened to such light heads and profane hearts.”

The last paragraph in the document is headed “ Caveat for the Burghs.” It seems that the Convention of the Royal Burghs had been approached to give its sanction to the new book.<sup>3</sup> This naturally gave offence to those who held that the only body to deal with such a matter was “ a free and right constitute General Assembly.” The writer was afraid that the new Psalter would be the thin edge of the wedge, and he expresses his fear lest the “ Common Order prefixed ” to the Psalms and the “ Catechise following them ” should be removed as well. The next thing to be imposed would be “ the new service . . . the next day the organs.”<sup>4</sup>

Two things are evident from this paper. The first is, that its compilers

<sup>1</sup> The later revisers left this verse pretty much as it was.

<sup>2</sup> It is difficult to understand why there should have been this fear, if the people were opposed to the new psalter, as so many later writers would have us believe.

<sup>3</sup> The Convention of Royal Burghs was a democratic institution and voiced the opinion of the laity in a way the church courts did not. Calderwood's concern shows that he was afraid that these laymen would take a line on this matter opposite to his own. We do not know what action, if any, the Convention took, as the minutes for the period in question are missing.

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Rutherford, writing from Anwoth on June 2nd, 1631, states that he had received a letter from Edinburgh “ certainly informing me that the English service and the organs and King James Psalms are to be imposed upon our kirk.” *Letter XV, Bonar's Edition.*

were much afraid that the Psalter would be brought into use in spite of their protests. When one remembers, that before this could be done, it would be necessary for the worshippers to provide themselves with copies, it seems clear that the opposition to its use could neither have been so deep seated, nor so widespread, as has been represented by many writers. If the people did not want to use it they had only to refuse to buy it, for there was no suggestion that copies should be provided at the public expense.

The second point is, that Calderwood (or whoever wrote this paper) had not examined the book thoroughly himself. In the last paragraph of the first section we find the statement, "Others have observed that there is a whole double verse wanting in the 43rd psalm: and another psalm hath twelve lines in the double verse." The fact that the writer had to depend on others for these observations tells its own tale.

A second paper preserved among the Calderwood MSS. is entitled, "Reasons against the Receiving of this new Metaphrase of the Psalms," and its contents are largely similar to those in the first paper. Two new arguments are brought forward. One is that the "metaphrasts" have added matter of their own to the text of scripture. No examples are given, but these it is alleged may be seen in almost every psalm. That there was something to be said for this criticism may be seen in the rendering of the 12th verse of the 89th Psalm:

" The freezing north, the warming south,  
 they both by Thee were made :  
 The stately Tabor, Hermon fair  
 shall in Thy Name be glad "

where the four adjectives have been inserted by the versifier.<sup>1</sup>

The other argument is a financial one. If the new Psalter should be adopted, then the old one would have to be discarded. The country would be burdened by the loss of three hundred thousand copies of the old and by the cost of six hundred thousand copies of the new. It would be interesting to learn how these figures were arrived at. At the time they were written there were some eight hundred and fifty parish churches in Scotland, and we are asked to believe that the average number of copies of the Psalter in use in each was about three hundred and forty,

<sup>1</sup> One wonders how many people have noticed that in one of our most frequently sung metrical psalms, the 65th, there is a whole line added to the original text: "We surely shall be satisfied *with Thy abundant grace*." The last four words are not in the prose at all. King James keeps much closer to the original: "We with the goodness of Thy house, well satisfied shall be."



while of the new, each parish would have to purchase double that number.<sup>1</sup> Evidently the life of a Psalter was to be reckoned at fifteen years; for the period, during which the six hundred thousand Psalters would have to be purchased, is described as “during the privilege, which we hear is to be granted to the chief author.”<sup>2</sup> This was thirty-one years, and it was apparently anticipated that the original supply of Psalters would have to be renewed at least once in that time. The argument may have had some weight with Calderwood’s contemporaries; but it did not prevent them making a clean sweep of the old Psalter, less than twenty years later.

This second paper closes with a paragraph declaring that the reasons stated against receiving the new Psalter were equally valid against any proposal to revise it. Revision meant in some measure approbation, and approval by the revisers “may easily be obtained.” Again we see the fear that the new might win its way despite the objectors. Perhaps the principal reason for the opposition may be found in the last sentence of the paper. “The pretended prelates therefore cannot meddle with this business.” The Psalter was to be condemned, not so much on its merits—or rather demerits—but because it was being sponsored by the party which supported the King and the Bishops.

We do not know to what extent the arguments adduced in the two papers appealed to the ministers of the time, but we do know that in one respect they were of little avail. Much of the first paper is taken up with a eulogy of the Reformation Psalter, which the writer of the protest evidently regarded as being almost perfect. Everybody knew it and could sing from it. “He that taketh up the Psalms is able to sing any tune,”<sup>3</sup> and so the Pastors could “direct a psalm to be sung, agreeable to the doctrine to be delivered.” So the writer concludes his first section with the strongly expressed hope that “the psalms in metre as they have been, and are used privately and publicly in Scotland, ought to be retained and no wayes suppressed.”

Calderwood’s views of the Scots Reformation Psalter were not those held by his contemporaries. Robert Baillie was of opinion that almost the only thing in the Scottish Church which required to be reformed was the Psalm Book. He refers to the labours of Rous as helping “the

<sup>1</sup> This implies that every adult in Scotland could read, which we know was far from being the case. Calderwood seems to have forgotten that there were many congregations in Scotland where English was unknown, the whole population being Gaelic speaking. The law of Scotland required every *householder* to possess a Bible and a Psalm Book.

<sup>2</sup> Evidently Calderwood believed that there was at least one other author.

<sup>3</sup> A statement very far from the truth.



old Psalter, in most places faulty.”<sup>1</sup> A letter from the Scots Commissioners in London, sent to the Commission of the General Assembly in 1647 has the words, “ We believe it is generally acknowledged that there is a necessity of some change, there being so many just exceptions against the old and usual Paraphrase (of the Psalms).” This letter is signed by George Winram, Samuel Rutherford and George Gillespie.<sup>2</sup>

A little later in the same year we find Gillespie declaring in the General Assembly<sup>3</sup> that “ All grant that there is a necessity of the change in the old Paraphrase.” Less than nineteen years after Calderwood had made his emphatic protest against any attempt to remove the old Psalter, it was superseded without any protest from any party in the Church. For once, in the stormy history of the Scottish Zion, a very great change was made, affecting every worshipper, and yet nobody had any objections to offer. Nothing like it had happened before, or has happened since.

Calderwood was doubtless an able man ; but his opinions were not always those of the church in general. Referring to his conduct in the Assembly of 1648 Baillie says : “ Mr David Calderwood, serving his own very unruly humour, did very much provoke. He has been so intolerable, through our forbearance, that its like he shall never have so much respect among us.”<sup>4</sup>

There is no reason to believe that Calderwood’s protests appeared in print until the 19th century ; but they may have been circulated in manuscript, though one would imagine that in that case the circulation would be somewhat restricted. The copies preserved in the National Library appear to be the only ones extant. It may be considered certain that these protests came under the notice of Alexander, for many of the faults, so faithfully pointed out, were amended in the second edition.

Whatever may have been the resentment against the book in Scotland, such resentment did not prevent Charles from proceeding to make arrangements for the introduction of his father’s Psalter. Shortly after the book had been printed he wrote to the Prelates, telling them that they should use whatever means they considered best to have it received in the schools and thereafter used in worship.<sup>5</sup> Evidently at that period—and for long

<sup>1</sup> *Letters and Journals*, II, 120.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 541. Winram was an Elder. He was Laird of Liberton.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 451. Gillespie was the youngest minister to occupy the Moderator’s chair in the General Assembly. He is believed to have written the definition of God in the Shorter Catechism.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters and Journals*, III, 21. There are a number of other references to his unruly temper.

<sup>5</sup> *Register of Royal Letters*, II, 537.

afterwards—it was customary for school children to learn portions of the metrical psalms by heart.<sup>1</sup>

It seems that a certain amount of success had followed this venture ; for some time later the King ordered the Archbishop of St. Andrews to consult with his colleagues in the episcopate in order that some arrangements might be made for the provision of Psalm books in the country. Apparently it was expected that the new Psalter would soon be in use in the Parish Churches.<sup>2</sup>

This was in May 1632, and on the day the letter was despatched from Whitehall to Scotland, a somewhat similar letter was sent to the Primate of Ireland (Archbishop of Armagh) asking him to take the advice of “such of the bishops or others of the clergy . . . as may convenientlie soonest meet with you” to consider how the new Psalter might be introduced into that country.<sup>3</sup> Two months earlier, the Archbishop of Canterbury (Laud) had also been addressed in similar terms, “remitting the manner how it (the introduction of the Psalter) should be done, unto you.”<sup>4</sup>

Another letter was sent to the “Ministerie of Edinburgh,” asking them to use their best endeavours that these psalms “be received and sung in our churches of our burgh of Edinburgh.” At the same time the Magistrates of the city were also approached with a view to their setting an example, “for effectuating of what we so earnestly desire in this.”<sup>5</sup>

Apparently there was some expectation that the General Assembly was to meet, for, two months later (6th July, 1632), we find the King writing to the Clergy of Scotland, “understanding that you are shortly to be assembled together,” asking them to “effectuate that which we so much desire, not only for the memory of the author, and the approved sufficiency of the work, but for the good which we hope shall be reaped by the use of it in the Church.”<sup>6</sup>

A later letter (13th September, 1632) refers to an insufficiency of copies received in Scotland, and states that orders had been given that a supply should be sent to the Archbishop of St. Andrews “as conveniently as may be most expedient.” Again the King’s pleasure is declared that

<sup>1</sup> In Charles’ reign attempts were made to increase the schools in Scotland, an improvement much needed.

<sup>2</sup> *Register of Royal Letters*, II, 591.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 581.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 591.

<sup>6</sup> In a letter of June 2, 1631, Samuel Rutherford mentions that he has heard “that the Bishops are dealing for a General Assembly.” Had they succeeded in getting it, in all likelihood the new Psalter would have been adopted by the Church. *Letter XV*, Bonar’s Edition.

“some speedy course” be taken to have these Psalm books used in the churches; but there is a significant addition, which may have reference to complaints which had been received.<sup>1</sup> “Thereupon, we shall forthwith give order for the reforming, or adding, to the said work, what shall be found necessary; that thereafter a course for a full impression from time to time may be established.” It thus appears that the 1631 edition was not intended to be final.

A similar letter to the Archbishop of St. Andrews of the same date ends with the hope that the “work may be found settled at our coming, God willing, at the next spring of the year, to that our kingdom, which we will take as very acceptable service done unto us.”

It would be interesting to know whether the new Psalter was used at the Coronation of Charles in Holyrood, on 18th June, 1633. We know that the 89th Psalm (or part of it), with the Doxology, was sung congregationally, but in what version is not stated. Most probably Charles would see that his father’s version was the one used; all the more so, as it presents a better form here than does the Reformation Psalter. Dr. Cooper suggests that (as at the English Coronation at Westminster) only the first six verses would be sung. It is more likely that the first “portion” consisting of four double verses would be used in its entirety with the Doxology following.<sup>2</sup> In France, it was customary to chant the whole Psalm (52 verses) at Coronations; but though the staying power of Scots congregations was (and is) considerable, it is not likely that so long a metrical psalm would be sung in full.<sup>3</sup>

Next year (1634) we find Charles again in communication with the Archbishop of St. Andrews regarding the way in which “the translation of the Psalms of David done by our late royal father” might be introduced into the church, to be “sung universally.” From this letter, which is dated from Greenwich, 15th May, 1634, we learn that the new version was now “fully renewed, approved and fitted for the Press,” and that the “goodness of the work” was quite evident.<sup>4</sup> Apparently the Archbishop was not in too great a hurry to do anything, and towards the end of the same year (*circa* 20th December) Charles wrote to the Privy

<sup>1</sup> *Register of Royal Letters*, II, 620.

<sup>2</sup> See Dr. Cooper: *Four Scottish Coronations* (Aberdeen and Glasgow Ecclesiological Societies), 24-31. Marquis of Bute *Scottish Coronations*, 97-98. There is reason to believe that the *Veni Spiritus Creator* was sung from the Scots Reformation Psalter at the Coronation.

<sup>3</sup> It is possible that King James’ Psalter was used in the Churches where Charles worshipped during his visit. We know that the Anglican Book of Common Prayer was used on those occasions. M’Millan *Worship of the Scottish Reformed Church*, 109.

<sup>4</sup> *Register of Royal Letters*, II, 757.



Council, telling them that he had arranged that the "Translation of the Psalms whereof our late dear father, of happy memory, was author," was to be printed, and that the Council was to take order "in such manner as is requisite, that no Psalms of any edition whatsoever be either printed hereafter within that our kingdom; or imported thither, either bound by themselves, or other ways from any foreign port." Further, the Council were to use their "best endeavours by all possible and lawful means from time to time to assist our clergy and to see these Psalms received and sung in all the churches of that Kingdom." It is in this letter to the Council that Charles stated that "the first beginning (of the public use of the Royal Psalter) may be made in that our ancient kingdom, where our said dear father the author was born."<sup>1</sup> Evidently by this time Charles had come to the conclusion that the only chance of getting the new Psalter introduced into his dominions, as a whole, was via Scotland. If once the book was established there it might be possible to get the Church of England to adopt it. There is considerable reason to believe that the same idea was in the mind of Laud when he was so anxious to get the Liturgy which is associated with his name introduced in Scotland.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the expressed desire of the King, the Privy Council took no steps to stop the printing of the Old Psalter. As a matter of fact, what is undoubtedly the finest of all the editions of that book was published a few months later by the heirs of Andro Hart in Edinburgh. This was the first edition—indeed the only one—to be printed with all its melodies provided with "harmonies."<sup>3</sup> The same year (1635) a small edition was published by Robert Young in Edinburgh, and as he was the King's Printer, it is evident that the King's instruction had remained a dead letter.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps Charles knew that such was the case, for in May 1635 we find him writing again to the Council telling them that he was having the "Psalms done by our late dear father of worthy memory" printed along with the Liturgy, to be "received and used together in that our kingdom." He expected, he adds, that the Council would help in this

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, 815. This letter is not dated, but may be placed between 20th and 23rd December, 1634.

<sup>2</sup> See *William Laud and Scotland* by Professor H. Watt, D.D. *Records*, Scottish Church History Society, Vol. VII, Part III.

<sup>3</sup> This edition has been twice reprinted: in 1864 by Rev. Neil Livingstone, D.D., and in 1935 by Sir Richard Terry.

<sup>4</sup> In the Bodleian Library, Oxford, there is a copy of a Psalter published in Edinburgh, by John Wretton in 1635. James Bryson, Printer, Edinburgh, was responsible for two editions of the Old Psalter in 1640. The one, which was a Quarto, was evidently intended to be bound with Bibles. The other appears to have been a remainder of the 1634 edition, by Hart's heirs, issued with a new title page.



matter, both "by the authority you have from us and by your own good example, and in the meantime that you discharge all other Psalms in metre to be printed." The "Liturgy" mentioned above was of course the "Book of Common Prayer," which was introduced some two years later and which is still known—not altogether incorrectly—as Laud's Liturgy. We learn from Baillie<sup>1</sup> that a great part of it was in print before Yule 1635, though it was not published until about fifteen months later. Evidently there was again some hitch in the matter.

It might have been expected that the new Psalter would have been printed in Scotland, all the more so, as the new Service Book was being printed there by Robert Young, King's Printer, Edinburgh. Alexander had a poor opinion of Young, and in consequence did not employ him. Writing to Maxwell, Bishop of Ross, in February 1636, Alexander says: "Young the printer is the greatest knave that ever I have dealt with, and therefore trust nothing to him, or to his servants, but what of necessity you must." The new Psalter was therefore printed by Thomas Harper in London, in 1636, a wise move, seeing that it was intended for use in the Church of England as well as in the Church of Scotland. The title page has a sort of renaissance design, with the lion of the Royal Arms on the one side and the unicorn on the other. These are the only symbols to mark the connection of the book with royalty, and there is nothing in the way of an authorisation by Charles as there had been on the 1631 book. In the centre of the title page there is a rather artistic design showing the rose and thistle intertwined. The title of the book remained the same, "The Psalms of David translated by King James."

This Psalter, as has been said, was printed in London and bears the date 1636. Steps were taken to have copies sent to Scotland,<sup>2</sup> in order that these should be bound up with the Service Book. In February 1637 the King wrote to the Privy Council stating that as the psalms had been altered, revised and approved "by authority from us and the Clergy of both kingdoms," no more copies of the "old psalms" were to be made, and as far as possible the Council was to assist at the "printing and receiving of the new, to be generally received and sung in all the churches of this said kingdom."<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, when the Privy Council

<sup>1</sup> *Letters and Journals*, I, 4.

<sup>2</sup> In the possession of the writer is a copy of the Scottish Book of Common Prayer, with which are bound up the prose and metrical psalters (both bearing date 1636) and also "Certain Godly Prayers." These last must also have been sent from England. The cover bears the letters C. R. and the royal arms as used by King Charles. It is possible that the copy was meant for the Chapel Royal at Holyrood. It must have been one of the earliest copies to be bound.

<sup>3</sup> *Register of Privy Council*, 2nd Series VI, 409-410.

met on 14th March, 1637, it was enacted that the new psalms were to be received "for the good of the church and the memory of the author." All further impressions of the old psalms were discharged, as well as the bringing in of any copies of the same from England, "to the intent that the new psalms may be imprinted and generally received and sung in all the churches of this kingdom." The Archbishop of St. Andrews, who was present along with the Archbishop of Glasgow, the Bishops of Galloway, Aberdeen, Ross and Brechin, was empowered to summon all the printers and stationers within the kingdom before him; that they should know of this enactment and be warned to carry it out.<sup>1</sup>

By this time it is probable that copies were on sale, for in December of the previous year it had been enjoined by the Privy Council "that every Parish betwixt and Pasche next procure unto themselves two at the least of the said Books of Common Prayer (with which the Psalter was bound up) for the use of the Parish."<sup>2</sup> In the following June another proclamation was issued by the Privy Council stating that while "great numbers of the ministry of the best learning and soundest judgment and gifts" had given obedience to the former enactment, "some others of the ministry, out of curiosity and singularity," refused to do so. These latter were ordered to conform, "under the pain of rebellion and putting to the horn."<sup>3</sup> Shortly after that came the great outburst with which the name of Jenny Geddes is associated, which decided effectively the fate of both Service Book and Psalter.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> If the Archbishop could not do this himself, power was to be given to the Provost and Bailies of all Burghs to take the necessary steps.

<sup>2</sup> *Privy Council Register*, 2nd Series VI, 336.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 448-9.

<sup>4</sup> In August, 1637, the Privy Council issued a declaration to the effect that its act regarding the buying of the Service Books extended "allanerlie to the buying of the said books and no further." In addition it is stated that the Council had no intention of making people use the books. *Ibid.*, 521, 694.